



## HINDSIGHT

# Studley Samson, 'A Soldier of the Revolution'

By Jody Morgan

Shreds of evidence offered by vital records, deeds and probate documents, furnish a scant framework on which to reconstruct the fabric of interconnected lives which gives Duxbury history such a tangible quality. Fortunately, many genealogical accounts of early Duxbury families include enough personal data to extend the research. Occasionally, as a familiar quilt block pattern might appear to a textile conservationist, all the pieces begin to fit.

Forty-two years after her husband Jabez died, Abigail Prior decided her home to her daughter Abigail and her husband, Studley Samson. Apparent in the language of the document is the understanding that Abigail and Studley would continue to live with the widow Prior and care for her as they had been doing. Indeed, Studley probably moved in with his bride and her mother upon his marriage Nov. 16, 1780. Abigail was 27, but Studley was only 21.

Born April 27, 1759, Studley Samson was a few days shy of his 16th birthday when the Battle of Lexington and Concord occurred. Today parents feel a combination of anxiety and pride as they watch their 16-year-olds pilot the family car unaided from the driveway for their first independent tour behind the wheel. One can only imagine how Studley's family felt as he left Duxbury for the "eight months' service" in 1775.

Looking back on the course of the entire Revolution in "From Lexington to Liberty," Bruce Lancaster writes: When George Washington trotted past Cambridge Common, through the Harvard Yard, or along the flats by the lower Charles, there was always one overriding problem to leap at him. There were his troops. How long would he have them? . . . From what day did the eight-month term date? The Connecticut men and some of the Rhode Islanders claimed that the day of their original summons marked the

start of their service, and if they held to this, the first of December and not the first of January, 1776, would see them marching home, leaving a fatal gap in the lines about Boston.

Massachusetts called on the militia to replace the eight-month troops, and Studley, probably too young to have been enrolled in this contingent, returned home. In 1778, however, he signed on for a new mission. Colonel Calvin

French fleet, went so far as to insult our nation and call the French traitors. Our two Generals [Sullivan and Lafayette] were almost on the point of fighting a duel." Silently, by night, John Glover's Marblehead men managed to ferry Sullivan's entire force back to the mainland.

Having seen service, but little action, Studley Samson turned to the sea. Along with fellow Duxbury residents

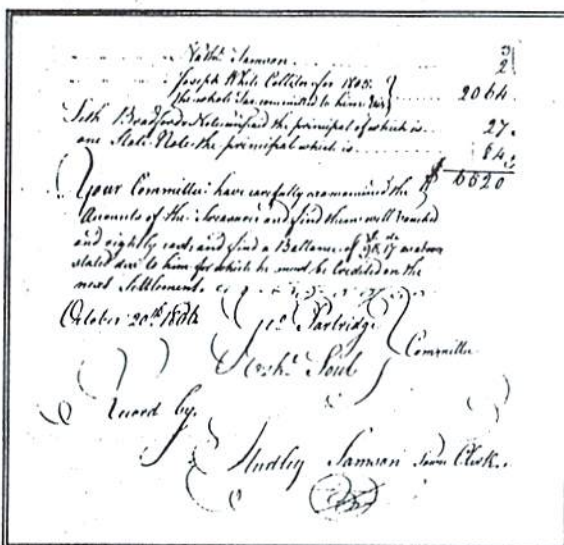
only description of him I have found to date was recorded at this time. Studley was listed as: "stature 5ft., 5in., dark complexion."

The war did not end in 1780, but Studley's service as a soldier and seaman seems to have ceased with his marriage to Abigail Prior. Duxbury Vital Records notes after the date of his death, May 9, 1835, "A soldier of the Revolution." But surely there was more to his story.

Before Studley and Abigail became property owners in 1799, they filled the tiny house built by Moses Soule with numerous children. Deborah, born in 1783, died young, but Studley Jr., Gaius, Abigail, Alfred, and a second Deborah, all born by 1793, survived to adulthood. The youngest daughter, Joanna, suffered the fate of their firstborn.

Without property in his own name and apparently lacking sufficient income to qualify otherwise, Studley Samson could not attend town meeting as a voting member. Thus, it is not surprising that his name does not appear among the lists of men selected annually to serve the town as surveyors of highways, sealers of wood, overseers of the poor, and the like. What is remarkable is that April 1, 1799, several months before becoming a landowner, Studley Samson was elected town clerk.

Serving in this capacity for the next 10 years, Studley Samson provided records of many of the decisions that shaped the village of Duxbury as it grew into its early 19th century glory as a shipbuilding center. Thanks to his florid, yet legible, handwriting, no doubt acquired during a limited term in Duxbury schools, we are able to read both the town's plea to Thomas Jefferson to end the embargo and Jefferson's reply to Duxbury. And as these pieces of the patchwork come back together, additional details of the fabric of the life and times of Studley Samson are revealed.



Among the items recorded by Studley Samson, Town Clerk, are many of the decisions that shaped Duxbury history.

Partridge of Duxbury had been called upon to march his men to Rhode Island to aid General John Sullivan of New Hampshire who was planning to recapture Newport from the British. The term of Studley's service on this occasion is listed as only 15 days.

The Newport maneuver was intended to coordinate an American attack by land with French naval support. The unexpected appearance of a substantial British fleet coupled with unfavorable New England weather left General Sullivan stranded. In the words of the Chevalier de Pontgibaud, a French volunteer present at the scene (Voices of 1776, Richard Wheeler): "General Sullivan, angry at finding himself no longer supported by the

Freeman Loring, Amasa Delano, and Joseph Barstow, Studley sailed on the 22-gun privateer Mars in the summer of 1779. Depending on speed and maneuverability to outwit the heavily armed British warships blockading the coastline, America's licensed pirates preyed heavily on the British merchant fleet. According to the Compact History of the Revolutionary War penned by Ernest and Trevor Dupuy: "By the conclusion of the war the Congress had issued letters of marque to no fewer than 1,697 vessels, ranging from full-rigged ships to tiny sloops. The privateers captured 3,178 British vessels...."

The sea must have suited Studley. He signed on as a seaman aboard the brigantine Dolphin May 25, 1780. The